Rachael Thatcher

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Martin Luther King Jr. changed America during his life in a peaceful manner that contradicted many views from other reformers who believed in a violent or aggressive pursuit of equality. He knew that to achieve peace among different races, he had to use peace. He gave speeches, led non-violent boycotts, and used other methods of civil disobedience to raise awareness of civil rights. Some of his most famous efforts included his letter from a Birmingham city jail, the march on Washington, and the Montgomery bus boycott. All of these worked towards the end of racial segregation and discrimination. A very significant change occured because of Martin Luther King Jr. and mostly everything he did ended up with positive results in the direction of equal rights.

Slavery was outlawed in 1865 when the 13th amendment was ratified. However, African Americans continued to be looked down upon and treated poorly. Later the supreme court decided on a “separate but equal” law which required services, facilities and public accommodations to be separated by race, on the condition that the quality of each group's facilities were to remain equal. This was not the case at all, it led to inferior places for blacks and complete inequality. Officials tried to prove that both races had what the other did, but it was obvious that this wasn’t true. Jim Crow laws prevented this from happening because they separated the two. Nothing could be equal as well as being separate, if there are two facilities for the same thing, such as a bank, the nicer one will clearly be given to the white community. Or even if it started out the same, the black crowd simply wouldn’t have the money to keep it up the same. Black Codes also assisted in the prevention because it restrained blacks from even having the same rights as whites. At the time it could be argued that it was fair, but it’s obvious that it truly wasn’t. As much progress as African Americans had made still seemed as if they were going nowhere and equality would never be reached.

The worse the situation got, and the more the African Americans felt as if they could almost taste freedom, the more they began to take a stand. Leaders rose up everywhere, fighting for their rights and putting their lives on the line for the hope of opportunity and their future. Among these was a prominent leader by the name of Martin Luther King Jr. He was a Baptist minister, clergyman, and a civil rights activist who came to be known as one of the best orators of all time. He was able to capture the attention of not only African Americans across the nation, but the white population as well. His peaceful tactics put him in the newspaper, on tv, and in people’s conversations, and spread the word of his mission. His goal was to gain equality of everyone in America in a nonviolent manner and raise public consciousness of the civil rights movement. There were other leaders who had a vicious approach, but King argued that fear would not gain respect and only turn the others away more, therefore he used reason and protest. Nonviolent measures included sit ins, marches, and boycotts of which they harmed nobody. These proved to be effective methods because of the progress that they made and a good majority of these were put together and organized by King.

When King was arrested and sent to jail for his part in the Birmingham campaign, he wrote a letter in response to Alabama clergymen who said that social injustices should be fought in court and not in the streets. King countered it by saying that he usually wouldn’t pay attention to anyone against his motives, but that this had a good point to prove. He included his famous quote “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” and went on to explain how if it was only fought in the courts it would not draw the attention of regular people across the nation and wouldn’t convince nearly as many people that he was correct. How could he persuade them if they couldn’t hear him? As he stated, "We know through painful experiences that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor, it must be demanded by the oppressed". He knew that if he did things the way they wanted him to, he wouldn’t get anywhere. (King, 1) This is why he chose to use his methods of peaceful protest. The letter itself was another representation of this because he was only writing a letter, but it ended up becoming so much more than that. Not only did he reach out to the clergymen that the letter was addressed to, but it became so popular it was published in the newspaper which proves that it was something that would interest readers, even whites who were the majority of them. He went on to explain how it was worth it to be arrested and that in the cases of the laws he was fighting that they should be broken because “One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws”. Quotes such as these that he wrote in his letter encouraged and inspired other african americans to take a stand and disobey unjust laws as well (King, 1). This one simple letter was talked about and publicized so much and by itself turned so many people to King’s side. It made people learn to speak up and stand up and explained Martin Luther King’s ideas as well as what made him correct. Martin Luther King's letter from a Birmingham city jail called attention to issues brought up by clergymen and proved to everyone that nothing could be done if they didn't use their efforts. He was successful in pulling some readers or listeners onto his side or at least convincing them into a position where they wouldn’t be a threat. (Iannone, 1)

Perhaps one of Martin Luther King Jr’s most famous actions was his “I have a dream” speech which he delivered at the March on Washington on August 28th, 1963. The March on Washington was a peaceful protest organized by King which raised awareness of the civil rights movement. This was crucial because it spread the word on the efforts that were taking place and encouraged people to take part across the country. Without public support, the movement would make no progress(Kuusisto, 3). King decided that he had to think of a way to grab the most attention he possibly could as to gain the most support, and so he chose a march in Washington DC. After all, what better place is there to try and change laws? Kuusisto stated, "Marching is both peaceful and active, a message in itself. It proves that people are on the move. Whether they march to the realization of a dream, on injustices, or for freedom, they demand attention." And he couldn’t be more correct. Martin Luther King Jr was marching for the dream that he spoke about, the injustices he was fighting against, and the freedom his race desired. The march took a metaphorical form too in the sense that they were moving towards their goals. United they stood a chance against white society, and together they knew that they could pull through.(Kuusisto, 2) As King famously said in his speech, -"And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed". What they get out of this plan was that King was established as one of the greatest orators of the time and it may not have sparked a specific change but it definitely changed a state of awareness and attitude. When Martin delivered his speech, people across the country of all races and ages, were inspired. He spoke with authority and will, and everyone was paying attention just like he wanted. The March on Washington raised awareness of the civil rights movement. This was crucial because it spread the word on the efforts that were taking place and encouraged people to take part across the country. I wouldn’t say that an exact change came from this, but King was recognized and appreciated which was a step in the right direction. (Kuusisto, 3)

One of the most significant changes was the desegregation of buses. This was brought about by the Montgomery Bus Boycott in Montgomery, AL which started with a woman named Rosa Parks who refused to give up her seat to a white man. After this leaders such as MLK started the boycott and all blacks did not use the bus system. (Chappell, 1) The bus company took a hard hit economically and the supreme court ruled bus segregation unconstitutional, therefore eventually their efforts were successful. “King's leadership from his Dexter Avenue Baptist Church pulpit, a stone's throw from the state capitol, modilized more than 30,000 Black riders--75 percent of the transit system's customers--to peacefully boycott buses by carpooling and walking” says Chappell. This should give you some idea as to how many people were listening to him and complying with everything he told them. This was one change that actually had a tangible result because of King. There was the supreme court ruling and the desegregation of buses. The desegregation of buses was a huge victory in their ‘battle’ because not only did it equalize their transportation, but it proved that something could be done and that our efforts are working. Martin Luther King Jr and his followers were making a difference. (Chappell, 1)

As you can see, Martin Luther King Jr was an inspiring and influential leader who changed the world by changing the attitudes of the people in it. His power of persuasion won over most of the country and even though some significant changes were not made directly through him, there is a good chance that he pushed the movement in the right direction. He grabbed America’s attention with his letter from a Birmingham city jail, gained awareness from political aspects as well as protesters through the march on Washington and the ‘I have a dream’ speech, and actual tangible changes such as the desegregation of buses. King transformed the world and led the way to equality.

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